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ACTION AF-00

INFO	LOG-00	NP-00	AID-00	AMAD-00	CIAE-00	INL-00	DODE-00
	PERC-00	DS-00	EAP-00	EUR-00	VC-00	H-00	TEDE-00
	INR-00	IO-00	LAB-01	L-00	VCE-00	NRC-00	NSAE-00
	OES-00	OIC-00	NIMA-00	PA-00	MCC-00	GIWI-00	FMPC-00
	SP-00	SSO-00	SS-00	R-00	EPAE-00	SCRS-00	DSCC-00
	PRM-00	DRL-00	G-00	NFAT-00	SAS-00	SWCI-00	/001W
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FM AMEMBASSY HARARE

TO SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 8598

INFO SOUTHERN AFRICAN DEVELOPMENT COMMUNITY

AMEMBASSY ABUJA

AMEMBASSY ACCRA

AMEMBASSY ADDIS ABABA

AMEMBASSY DAKAR

AMEMBASSY KAMPALA

AMEMBASSY NAIROBI

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NSC WASHDC

USEU BRUSSELS

USMISSION USUN NEW YORK

C O N F I D E N T I A L HARARE 000982

SIPDIS

AF/S FOR D. MOZENA, B. NEULING

NSC FOR SENIOR AFRICA DIRECTOR C. COURVILLE

E.O. 12958: DECL: 12/31/2010

TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [PHUM](#) [ZI](#)

SUBJECT: THIRD FORCE READY TO EMERGE?

Classified By: Charge d'Affaires, a.i., Eric T. Schultz under Section 1
.4 b/d

Summary

[11.](#) (C) Pearson Mbalekwa, an ex-MP who recently resigned from ZANU-PF, told poloff on July 14 that a "third force" was coalescing and expected to emerge publicly within two months. The force, which so far lacked a leadership structure, would likely be composed of disaffected ZANU-PF elements largely aligned with Emmerson Mnangagwa, disenchanted war veterans, independent MP and former Information Minister Jonathan Moyo, and selected MDC elements. The group would be geared to contest the presidential election in 2008, and would stand on a platform of political moderation, economic reform, and rapprochement with the international community. Mbalekwa gave the MDC credit for opening the political system but said the third force would be much better positioned to take advantage of this given its ties to local opinion-makers. Mbalekwa said Manangagwa (to whom he is related) would likely remain within ZANU-PF for the time being rather than join this third force. However, he noted that Mnangagwa had "wide support" within Zimbabwe and openly wondered how the West would react to a Mnangagwa presidency. End Summary

Impetus Behind Third Force

[12.](#) (C) According to Mbalekwa, Mugabe's cynical manipulation of last year's presidium vote and the subsequent purges associated with the Tsholotsho meetings and party primaries had convinced many in ZANU-PF that change within the party would be impossible as long as Mugabe remained in charge. Moreover, he continued, Operation Restore Order and the country's continued rapid economic decline were further eroding public support of the party and deepening internal dissatisfaction with the leadership. Accordingly, growing numbers of disaffected ZANU-PF had been collaborating and were getting prepared to launch a "third force" - an independent party.

[13.](#) (C) Mbalekwa was coy on who within the party was involved because of their purported sensitivity about being identified "too soon." However, he did confide that the group included many loyal to Emmerson Mnangagwa, including five of the six provincial chairs dismissed over the Tsholotsho affair (excluding ex-Matabeleland South Chair Lloyd Siyoka). Mbalekwa also said Jonathan Moyo, "a very smart man", was playing a central role. He added that the group had been reaching out to selected MDC members but not to the MDC as a party; he expected several prominent MDC members to join the group. Many of the war veterans jettisoned by ZANU-PF in recent purges also were involved. Mbalekwa said the group as a whole has yet to create a formal structure or to identify a

leadership.

Timetable for Moving Forward

14. (C) Given the centrality of power in the office of the president, Mbalekwa said that the group was gearing its calendar and strategies single-mindedly for a presidential election in 2008. They were going to demand elections immediately, but this was just a tactical ploy to stymie ZANU-PF plans to consolidate presidential and parliamentary elections in 2010 by constitutional amendment later this year. (Note: Jonathan Moyo publicly called for immediate elections at a Crisis Coalition-organized public panel on July 7. End note.) The group was not likely to field official candidates in next year's urban council elections, although some council candidates might be aligned with or sympathetic to the group.

15. (C) Mbalekwa said he expected the group to emerge publicly within two months. He allowed that some thought this was too soon, given that the group was still trying to

muster commitments and would quickly be targeted by entrenched ruling party interests once they went public. Several factors outweighed these concerns, however. First, entrenched interests already had targeted them and stripped most of overt political power. Moreover, Operation Restore Order and the worsening national economic decline made this a particularly opportune time in terms of heightened public resentment of the regime. In addition, the elections were "only 30 months away", he noted, and developments in Zimbabwe had a way of taking unexpected turns that could overtake their plans. Zimbabweans were conservative by nature, he emphasized, and needed time to be persuaded on an alternative path. Finally, the ruling clique (i.e. the Mujuru faction) for now believed it "had won" through the past year's purges and sweeping election victory, and was relatively complacent.

16. (C) Mbalekwa reported that a Mnangagwa-aligned group had nearly broken away from the party six months ago over the ruling clique's "counter-coup" in the presidium vote. (Note: Mbalekwa had told the Ambassador at that time that Karanga and young Turk elements were prepared to "secede" from the party. End note.) At that time, however, the group calculated that they lacked the focused objectives and organizational wherewithal to capture the public's confidence in time to have a significant impact on the March elections. Furthermore, parliamentary elections would not have changed the balance of political power in any event given the President's control of the government and all its resources. Accordingly, they had decided to wait for a more propitious time - now was that time.

Mnangagwa's Role

17. (C) Throughout the discussion, Mbalekwa was very cagey about Mnangagwa's role in the group's plans. (Note: Just before last year's presidium vote, Mbalekwa published a lengthy letter in an independent newspaper "outing" Mnangagwa as a Vice-Presidential candidate and urging his election over Joyce Mujuru. Mnangagwa is Mbalekwa's cousin and long-time political patron. End note.) He characterized Mnangagwa as a "very guarded and quiet" man by nature, but stressed that they were confidants. Mbalekwa said Mnangagwa would be careful about his association with the group and would likely remain with ZANU-PF even when the group went public.

18. (C) Mbalekwa said Mnangagwa would cautiously go about his business within the government and party, even as the ruling clique continued overt efforts to marginalize him. Even after "demoting" him at the Party Congress, they had cost Mnangagwa his parliamentary seat by shifting four key wards to an adjacent constituency just four days before the election despite Mnangagwa's personal pleas to Mugabe. Within the past few weeks, he alleged, Mnangagwa's strident urging of the Politburo to shift tack on economic policy met a mute response even though many present shared Mnangagwa's views.

19. (C) Mbalekwa reported that most ZANU-PF elements in the nascent third force historically had been aligned with Mnangagwa but many were disappointed over his passiveness as the ruling clique proceeded with its purges of Mnangagwa's senior supporters. Indeed, Mnangagwa's influence had been the decisive factor in forestalling a "secession" after the Party Congress, he said. Urging that Mnangagwa nonetheless had "wide support" within Zimbabwe, Mbalekwa asked about likely Western reaction to Mnangagwa as a leader in view of his "historical baggage" (referring to his senior role in the Matabeleland suppression/massacres of the 1980's).

Party Platform

110. (C) According to Mbalekwa, the group's platform would be political moderation, economic reform, and rapprochement with the West. He emphasized that the group was Western-oriented in its approach and, given the depths to which the economy

had plunged, placed high priority on re-engagement with the IFIs and rehabilitating Zimbabwe's investment climate. It recognized the centrality of rationalizing land reform and intended to work out a compensation plan for dispossessed white farmers and possibly to adjust land distribution to enhance agricultural productivity. International assistance would be critical in providing adequate compensation and developing a land use model that would gain investor confidence.

111. (C) Mbalekwa added that for the time being, the group's long term objectives would only be props in its top priority: engineering the end of Mugabe's presidency. Until there was a change in leadership, conditions would continue to deteriorate and fuel rhetoric to drive change. An early task would be to engineer popular opposition to constitutional amendments designed to prolong or perpetuate the ruling clique's control of the presidency.

Obstacles

112. (C) Mbalekwa said that the ruling party's patronage system was the group's biggest obstacle. Key potential supporters in the ruling party were reticent to overtly join or support the group for fear that they would lose their farm and other perks of party favor. The nation's economic implosion fueled resentment but rendered everybody more vulnerable. He noted, for example, that Daniel Shumba, the ex-provincial chair of Masvingo and telecom magnate, was a pivotal player in the group but would have to avoid public association as long as he had key telecom license applications pending. Others would be similarly timid, possibly undercutting perceptions of how wide the group's support and influence actually were.

113. (C) Financial resources and economic straits common to the entire populace were another handicap, Mbalekwa added. Petrol shortages, for example, would limit face-to-face interactions between players and with potentially key constituencies. (Note: During the lunch, Mbalekwa took a returned phone call from "Jonathan" in which he pleaded that he was "on empty" and needed to access at least "two barrels". End note.) Myriad symptoms of the economic crisis absorbed everybody's attention, diverting their time and resources from political activities.

Whither the MDC?

114. (C) Mbalekwa credited the MDC with key improvements to the political environment that the group intended to exploit. Thanks to the MDC's "forcing" the GOZ to accept SADC election principles in the regime's bid for international acceptance, public assembly was less restricted, the media was more accessible, and political violence was considerably reduced. However, his group would be in a much better position than the MDC to exploit such openings because, unlike the MDC, most of the principals had deep roots in rural communities and enjoyed the confidence of chiefs, headmen, district administrators and other local opinion-makers. Rural populations wanted change, he concluded, but would be more inclined to back a third force made up of trusted, familiar faces than the MDC, which was too unfamiliar or "foreign-aligned" to many rural audiences.

115. (C) According to Mbalekwa, the group was not interested in allying or merging with the MDC but was collaborating with unnamed selected members, who Mbalekwa expected would join them when the time came. Among those were key Ndebele. In this regard, he feared that South African President Mbeki was trying to foster an alliance between MDC Secretary-General Welshman Ncube and Politburo member Dumiso Dabengwa. As an aside, Mbalekwa reported that MDC President Morgan Tsvangirai had recently sought a private meeting with Mnangagwa but Mnangagwa had demurred.

Mbalekwa's Resignation

116. (C) Mbalekwa maintained that his resignation from ZANU-PF last month had been undertaken entirely on his own initiative. He feared that prior discussion would have

resulted in concerted party pressure to prevent his resignation. He said he intended the "unprecedented" resignation to inspire others to leave the party, especially Mnangagwa. He said the response augured well; many inside ZANU-PF had been supportive and were following his situation closely. The GOZ already had acted swiftly in response to his resignation, seizing equipment from his farm. Even then, the personnel who supervised the seizure were apologetic and supportive personally - indicative of popular sentiment behind his move, he argued. The ex-senior CIO official said he had not been physically threatened but, as he had sold all of his principal assets (e.g., Harare nightclubs) to support his farm new near Gweru, he was economically vulnerable.

Comment

17. (C) The continued failures of the ZANU-PF government, especially its mismanagement of the economy, and a self-absorbed MDC,s inability to capitalize politically, have clearly opened the door for a "third force" in Zimbabwean politics. What shape that third force takes is an open question. While others, especially in civil society, likely have a very different conception, Mbalekwa clearly sees such a force as a vehicle for Mnangagwa, especially if the latter ultimately loses the succession struggle within ZANU-PF. Mbalekwa may think that has already happened; Mnangagwa clearly doesn,t.

18. (C) If a third force does begin to emerge from within ZANU-PF, the ruling Zezuru clique of Mugabe and the Mujurus can be expected to use every means available to suppress it, including the sort of financial punishment meted out to Mbalekwa) and to Moyo before him. However, given the continued decline of the economy, it is no longer at all clear that the ZANU-PF patronage system has enough resources at its disposal to enforce discipline, leaving only one other sure option) repression. We are frankly encouraged that despite the risks some here, albeit few in number so far, seem finally willing to stand up to the regime.
SCHULTZ

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